

## **Eighth House & The Ancestral Legacy,**

*In honor of El Dia de los Muertos and the Sun in Scorpio (10/23-11/21) – the season we have greater ease of access into the deep psyche, and can potentially transmute old attachments & griefs – my three-part article on the Eighth House.*

In Mexico there's a holiday 'day of the dead' or dia de los muertos, the one day a year set aside to symbolically honor those who have passed, their favorite foods are made, and family comes together to remember, celebrate and pay homage to the people they love. A Mexican acquaintance of mine says, "This is one of the most beautiful holidays in our culture."

In modern America, when the heart stops beating and the funeral is over. At large, there is no symbolic ritual or gesture of remembrance for honoring the dead. We may visit the cemetery or remember them in our heart, even as most of us believe that 'life goes on' (even if we don't know where it is going on), we move on in our above-ground realities. But in Mexico, they know the dead live among the living. They may even sit down to eat dinner with us at night, if we set a place for them. It makes sense; where does the Spirit of our ancestors live, if not among and even *within* us? Our legacies are far more layered & complex than character traits we pick up from our parents, shared DNA and an inherited china or good silverware set. To deeply consider our ancestors is to consider all of the inheritances they left us, material & immaterial.

The Eighth House is a many-layered house. It is a house of intimacy. It is the house of a particular kind of intimacy – sharp, honest, loyal...the till death do us part line following our Seventh House marriage vow. It is the container holding stuff we push away, that we're ashamed of, our wounds, unresolved psychological material. The Eighth House is activated through intimacy, which

could explain why the trouble we encounter in marriage are so complex & difficult to see. We all have unresolved psychological material with our parents, hot spots that only come out once we enter the cauldron of committed intimacy. Maybe we're horrified the first time we discover that the attention we crave from our partner, is the attention we always wanted from our opposite sex parent – or any number of revelations about our wounding, how it affects and controls us today. Once we decide to partner up with someone for life, we enter the cauldron of intimacy, and the lingering ghosts of our past enter our primary relationship. These ghosts can extend beyond our remembered family and into the psychological histories of our ancestral memory, our far-reaching gene pool.

'If you can't get rid of the family skeleton, you might as well make it dance.' - George Bernard Shaw

The Eighth House is a mystery for many astrological students, where trying to apply the description “sex, death and taxes” to their own chart is a lot like looking for what's floating on the surface of a deep lake because we don't have the eyes to see into the deeps. This is, in essence, a water house and water is the blood of life shared by all. Water houses join us to Mystery, of memory, legacy, ancestry, and collective influences. **Consider that there is a powerful inheritance we share with our ancestors, which, if goes unclaimed or unexplored may become the ghost stories of our own lives.** After all, when Aunt Myrtle sat in that chair next to the window for all those years, lost in regret – where did the regret go? What about the love of a father, who was somehow incapable of showing love to his child? Or a grandfather's unexplained disappearance? A break up? When not honored, ghosts have a way of taking up residence in the lives of the living, even unacknowledged ancestors from generations ago.

I come from a long line of ancestors, just like you, and although I know a few ancient histories, I don't know many. In my childhood I recall my father once mentioning that my mothers' father was a 'ghost' in their marriage, but I had no idea what that meant until much later during my own psychological 'dig'. Psychologists make their bread and butter off of family of origins issues. I wonder, what if we aren't going far enough back in time? We may identify traits and difficulties shared with our parents, but what if identifying how the business of our great-great grandmother plays out in our life could help us? Could our family 'secrets', our ancestral unfinished business, be somehow invisibly related to the issues that haunt and trouble us? **If 'forgetting' is way to repeat the mistakes of history, maybe remembering can help us move freely forward.**

**Could our family 'secrets', our ancestral unfinished business, be somehow invisibly related to the issues that haunt and trouble us? Continued from Part 1: The Eighth House and The Ancestral Legacy.**

If the Eighth House holds our inheritances legacies & fortunes, material and immaterial, from other people, living or dead...how do we contact an ancient ancestral inheritance? Astrologically, through our Eighth House planet and ruling planet. Erin Sullivan, author of *The Astrology of Family Dynamics*, says the Eighth House is the house of the Ancestral Legacy and planets here describe our inheritance from our ancestors, which, to collect we need go into the in-between world – the realm of the unconscious- using symbolism, ritual and images. Astrologically, the Eighth House is a water house. Water holds the collective, ancestral and personal unconscious. For that reason, we can reach the water houses and their archetypes directly through our non-rational side, through use of symbols, metaphor, art (and more specifically for ancient issues) we can look to our familial ancestors for help and guidance.

I didn't come across this subject on a whim. In a Plutonian/Scorpionic vein, I began exploring the ancestral lineage of my Eighth House because a season of despair, general frustration and futility descended upon me. The biographical information of my day to day was neutral enough, but it didn't match the strong repetitive feelings I kept experiencing. One day while sitting in my hot tub, a clear as a bell thought entered my head, *these problems may not be my own*. This thought had strong vibrant energy attached to it so that when, in an email, I voiced this thought to my good friend she zipped right back with that line in the subject heading so exactly I thought she had quoted me. It turns out this exact phrase was on a a \*Family Constellation website page (\*see below) she had just been perusing.

That awareness ignited a little experiment ...in talking to the dead. I sat down, lit a candle and meditate for a few minutes. I had several of the birth charts of my ancestors, as far as I knew them, in front of me. Then I wrote down my issues at the top of a piece of paper: "Frustration. Futility. Anger. Despair" opened up my consciousness and asked my ancestors for help. I said, "I'm in quite a bit of pain and need your help. Ancestors, living or alive, if there is something you took to the grave that you need freeing through me, something you want to be heard, I am listening and I will do my best to help –without taking on your karma (that caveat, I felt, was a necessary protection)." I silently asked to know their regrets and frustrations. I told them I was willing to listen, and do what I humanly could. Then I waited.

I was surprised that the first person 'wanting to speak' was my maternal grandmother, still living. She had married to an alcoholic husband before alcoholism was recognized as a disease and was a source of shame for many families. As I wrote for her she used words like: 'trapped', 'powerless to change',

‘desperate’, and ‘I don’t know what to do’ all words that I had been using to describe my situation – though I didn’t have a clear source for these feelings. Writing down some of her frustrations seemed to help me; the intense feelings abated. I also wrote for other ancestors, who reminded me of their creative gifts. My grandfather was a concert pianist, my great-grandmother, a poet. How does this relate to my own Eighth House – empty of planets? Taurus is on the cusp, ruled by Venus. Venus is a prominent figure in my natal chart; she rules my Libran Ascendant and is conjunct my Cancer MidHeaven. My approach to the world, and to some degree my mission, is tied to Venus and so is my ancestral lineage. The fact that they wanted acknowledgement for their creative lives, told me that their creative lives affects me today -and shed light on the recurring feelings/thoughts I have, feelings like the following, *‘if I don’t make art, I will die.’* Did they have that thought, too?

I offered this eye-opening experience to a client of mine who I’ll call Virginia, a passionate woman with Mars in Taurus in the Eighth House (square Uranus in Leo). Virginia was experiencing deeply distressing sexual frustration in her marriage, causing her to look outside her marriage for the connection she craved. She also expressed concern about not wanting to “create more painful karma” in her relationships by handling all of her relationships in integrity, but as the tension and her marriage neared physically unbearable levels (Eighth House Mars-Uranus square) she was in crisis over her capacity to stay faithful. A creative and spiritually progressive woman, Virginia listened to my experiment. Then, through her own automatic call and response process she was able to identify an ancestor born in 1563, an ancestor she named Sarah. Sarah, a Crusader, was ostracized by her family for her fiery sexuality when she fell in passionate love with a man who wasn’t available to her (also a theme for

Virginia). Although long dead, Sarah was very much alive in the year 2010. Here, Virginia recounts her experience with Sarah and it's a beautiful example of the powerful healing possible when we ask for help from our ancestors and how using ancestral objects, art-making and ritual facilitates this.

### **Sarah's Story**

*I created a small art piece, a feminine assemblage of crimson raffia hair, a gown made from a beautiful paisley scarf I had been given by my maternal grandmother as a Christmas gift– which Grandmother had graciously returned to my mother so she could die unencumbered with material things– and so I could wear the scarf that had never been removed from the gift box. The feet of the art piece were beautifully adorned in a hand crafted pair of Cydwoq heels. These scraps I pieced together I fondly began to call the “wall woman” (resembling the shape of an ancestor I eventually name Sarah). Once visibly present, I initiated a line of healing inquiry into my maternal lineage. I made a connection between Sarah's shame and loss and my own. It became curious to me how all three women suffered sexual shame within their families. An excruciating psychological pain plagued each one of them and has been ongoing for nearly five hundred years! My mother was scorned by the very Grandmother who once owned but never wore the paisley scarf, scorned for carrying me out of wedlock. My mother had been deeply shamed by her own mother for becoming pregnant before marriage.*

*My entire life I have carried a huge sense of guilt and shame similar to my ancestor Sarah. When I became old enough to understand my mother's psychological plight, my aunts confided this to me. I grew up often feeling unwanted by her parents and a source of their own desperation, but insights from her aunties helped me release some of her self-blame for the anger and*

*frustration of her parents. As an adult woman, I had also been rejected by my family for following the passions of my twenty four year old heart when I married a black man (Virginia is white) I met while serving as a soldier in the U.S. Army in Mannheim Germany. My conception, during which my mother experienced sexual shame and hid her own passionate sexual nature, had been the family sore spot since the beginning – or perhaps a story repeated with origins from Sarah in the sixteenth century. I also bore a son conceived out of wedlock with a man not accepted by the white German Lutheran family, causing more familial guilt. The circle of shame and sexual frustration was handed down from the Reformation era through Sarah to my mother in the late 1950's and then finally it fell to me. I am the one who finally asked for healing beyond time.*

*Could our family 'secrets', our ancestral unfinished business, be somehow invisibly related to the issues that haunt and trouble us? Continued from Part 2: The Eighth House, Talking With the Dead*

Ancestral energies can get trapped in psychological 'complexes' we don't understand, and control our lives from the deeps. As said, the Eighth House is not rational, it is a water house, and the house of 'other people's stuff'. Our inheritance may be material or immaterial, from people living or dead – which presents a problem. To free the story from the stone or bone, shamans, regressionists, and therapists act as psychopomps. But there may be ways to help our self, like working with symbols, objects and forms. Think about how emotionally charged relics, possessions and items of those who have died, are to us; we often attribute the objects bequeathed to us with an awesome numinous power. Could they have psycho-magical power? Touching these objects, art-making, dialoguing with them, as Virginia did with her grandmother's scarf, could help free the spirits trapped within our bones.

Art is a direct way of allowing the unconscious to speak. During art-making we can experience an Eighth House alchemy – as sensing, touching, physically working with objects outside of our own psyche has a way of making the invisible touchable, the mysterious and unknowable, immediate and real. Like the Eighth House, art is not logical, it is intuitive, associative and symbolic. Art-making mysteriously transforms consciousness, reaching corners of the psyche logic cannot. Extraordinary transformative leaps can be made through trusting what the creative process reveals – even if what reveals seems or sounds ‘crazy’ (which is what Virginia asked if I thought of her when she told me about her experience of Sarah). This kind of intentional art-making is purposeful and alchemical (in Crowley’s Thoth Tarot deck, the Art card and Alchemy card are one in the same). Through art-making, opposites like life and death, shame and acceptance, unite- the definition of healing.

Is this necessary submission to the non-rational the missing ingredient that explains why talk therapy can only go so far? In the Eighth House we need symbols, symbol interpreters (like astrologers, tarot readers, dream interpreters, depth psychologists) and symbol- making. We need to artfully free the unlived and unresolved- what our ancestors either couldn’t express, or require healing resolution from us.

We are living embodiments of our ancestral gifts, talents and cultural inheritances as well as their wounds, hurts, griefs and unfulfilled and un-lived lives. The Eighth House is the storehouse for this. Our ancestral line is rich with wisdom and creativity and when unexpressed it can hold our most difficult symptoms & patterns.

So if the phrase “your problems may not be your own” rings bone true to you, they likely aren’t. It may be an expression that was thwarted somewhere along



the family line; patterns you may be 'elected' to resolve. Grieves un-grieved, love affairs unacknowledged, lives left unfinished – ancestral events affect our lives today. We may need to complete their story with our own lives. This isn't cause to be spooked or alarmed. Finishing business is an honorable task, and to experience wholeness, necessary. With intention, we can 'finish' or complete the ancestral unfinished business causing us problems. Remembering, through family lineage research, art, spiritual inquiry, symbol-making all can help us move forward with recovered power. There are numerous ways to experiment with this idea, some of them I offer below.